"The Chaplain And Casualties in Atomic Combat"
Carl P. Oberleiter

A SUMMARY

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A SUMMARY

The author outlines the characteristics and the effects of nuclear warfare, and their impact and implications in the ministery of the combat unit chaplain. Following a summary of the possible situations upon the atomic battlefield, Chaplain Oberleiter re-evaluates the historic role of the military chaplain, in the light of this devestating and unparalleled human crisis. The problems are analyzed with frank candor and practical steps are offered to facilitate a compassionate ministry to the wounded and dying. He never loses sight of the divine and human factors, to be found in the ministry of the chaplain, nor of the human limitations which he faces. His "chaplain disastor teams" are a creative contribution to this overwhelming probability.

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MONOGRAPH

THE CHAPLAIN AND CASUALTIES IN ATOMIC COMBAT

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FOREWORD

The purpose of this study is to analyze the possible problems and solutions affecting the ministrations of the Protestant Chaplain in relation to casualties in atomic combat at the Battle Group level, and to stress the urgency for immediate planning in the event of an atomic war.

Section I contains general information and the characteristics of a nuclear explosion to assist in understanding the reasons for the great number of casualties.

Section II deals with the Chaplain's relation to casualties, his mission, and the most effective place to accomplish that mission.

Section III includes problems of ministering to casualties, writing letters of condolence and officiating at mass burials.

The concluding section, Section IV, deals with the concept of Chaplain disaster teams in atomic combat.

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SECTION I

INTRODUCTION AND GENERAL REMARKS

1. INTRODUCTION.

When primitive man first discovered the means of producing fire by striking two flint stones together, thereby causing a spark to ignite tinder, civilization entered into a new era. And now, after thousands of years, civilized man has discovered another great force, the art of smashing atoms. This has resulted in the release of energy millions of times more powerful than the energy of any other known substance.

There is no disputing the scientific facts about atomic energy. For instance, "a single pound of U-235 (uranium) or PU-239 (plutonium) if completely fissioned, would produce heat equal to that produced by 1,300 tons of coal. Pound for pound, atomic fuel releases 2,600,000 times more energy than coal."[1] With the development of nuclear power and weapons of mass destruction, civilization stands on the threshold of a new and awesome era . . . . . the atomic age.

Kissinger compared the atomic age with the legend of Prometheus who sought to steal the secret of fire from the gods and was punished by being chained to a rock. Kissinger notes, "Our generation has succeeded in stealing the fire of the gods and it is doomed to live with its achievement."[2]

1. U-235 and PU-239 are considered the keystone of atomic energy. Lapp, "The New Force," pg 17.
2. Kissinger, "Nuclear Weapons and Foreign Policy," pg 65.

The horror of this achievement was realized by the devastation experienced in the first tactical use of the A-bomb over Hiroshima and Nagasaki.[3] Moreover, this earlier bomb is small in comparison to our present day weapons.[4]

Nuclear power and weapons of mass destruction have not reduced the threat of war, nor removed the soldier from the atomic battlefield so as to eliminate troop casualties. Major General H. B. Powell said, "In the atomic age the Infantryman is still the symbol of our Nation's strength. He has not been replaced by anything that razes, radiates, flies, floats, buzzes, booms or bangs."[5] In an atomic war, no area of the battlefield will be safe from attack. Personnel of Theater Army Headquarters will be in the same danger as the soldier in a Battle Group. However, a Battle Group may lessen its vulnerability by keeping close contact with the enemy, whereas the rear areas may be more of a target if not dispersed.

We are all too well aware of the tactical capabilities of a nuclear explosion. There are those who suggest that civilization is doomed to destruction by its own discovery. For any nation to possess the power to destroy all human life on this planet is an affront to the creative power of God. However, the experiences of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, recent tests at the Eniwetok Proving Grounds and the Nevada Test Site have shown that man can survive an atomic explosion, and that the

3. Hiroshima, 6 Aug 45, and Nagasaki, 9 Aug 45.

4. A 20-kiloton (equal to 20,000 tons of TNT) was dropped on Hiroshima and Nagasaki. Present day weapons are figured in megatons, or the yield equal to 1,000,000 tons of TNT.

5. "The Infantryman in the Atomic Age," Army Information Digest, April, 1958, pg 32.

number of casualties can be reduced when all conceivable precautions are taken.

The problem of mass casualties and how to deal with them is a subject of much discussion by civil defense and military authorities. It is evident that there will be a number of problems for which there are no proven answers. However, new problems will be sufficiently similar to past experience so that even inaccurate analogies will have a certain validity. Therefore, it is in the scope of this paper to consider the role of the Battle Group Protestant Chaplain in his ministrations to casualties in atomic combat. For as long as there will be men on battlefields, the Chaplain will be there to minister to his spiritual needs.

Before discussing the Chaplain and casualties in atomic combat, an attempt will be made to explicate simply the characteristics of a nuclear explosion.

2. CHARACTERISTICS OF A NUCLEAR EXPLOSION.

A nuclear bomb simulates the high-explosive bomb of World War II insofar as its destructive action is due mainly to shock or blast. However, a difference exists in that portion of the energy of a nuclear explosion that is emitted as light and heat, or "thermal radiation." In addition to the blast and thermal radiation, the explosion is accompanied by harmful gamma rays and lesser alpha and beta rays, which are the essence of "prompt radiation," a phenomenon taking place within the first ten seconds after the explosion. Moreover, there is a substance remaining after a nuclear explosion, particles of dust, water, or other substances

which emit radiation, which are known as the "residual radiation" or "fallout."[6]

3. THE EFFECTS OF A NUCLEAR EXPLOSION.

Casualties resulting from the blast are primarily caused by flying debris, structural collapse, or being violently thrown to the ground. A nominal bomb (20-kiloton) detonation has a peak overpressure of three pounds per square inch which will completely demolish an ordinary building, whereas pressures up to one hundred pounds per square inch are required to cause internal damage to the human body.[7]

It is estimated that at least fifty percent of the deaths in the Japanese bombings were caused by thermal radiation.[8] The most severe burns were noted within a one-half mile radius from ground zero, with diminishing to negligible effects at a two and one-half mile radius.[9]

Recent tests indicate that most radiation casualties are caused by "prompt radiation." It is estimated that only ten percent of the deaths in the Japanese bombings were caused by gamma radiation. Residual radiation is not as great a hazard as people originally feared.[10] However, the danger of radiation is determined by the distance the person is from ground zero.

The effects of a nuclear explosion are capable of inflicting casualties in such great numbers that an entire Division or a Battle Group

6. DA Pamphlet Nr. 39-1, "Atomic Weapons Employment," dtd June, 1956.
7. "Handbook of Atomic Weapons for Medical Officer," DA Pamphlet Nr. 8-11, pg 1.
8. "Soldier's Manual for Defense Against CBR Attack." FM 21-41, pg 114.
9. DA Pamphlet 8-11, pg 3.
10. FM 21-41, pg 115.

can become combat ineffective if the individual soldier does not take the necessary precautions to protect himself from blast, thermal and radiation effects.

SECTION II

THE CHAPLAIN IN ATOMIC COMBAT

4. PLACE OF THE CHAPLAIN IN COMBAT.

The place of the Chaplain in non-atomic combat was defined as being "up front with the troops." The place of the Chaplain in atomic combat will continue to be "up front with the troops." The Chaplain cannot absent himself from the atomic battlefield and be a mere visitor and expect to have the respect and confidence of the troops. The effectiveness of the Chaplain's ministration to casualties will depend largely upon how effective he was prior to the attack.

5. MISSION OF THE CHAPLAIN.

The mission of the Chaplain in atomic combat will be fundamentally the same as it is in peace time or in a non-atomic war, "to promote religion and morality in the Army."[11] There will be the regular exercise of his spiritual ministry, such as worship services, administering the sacraments of Holy Communion and Baptism, counselling, visitations, instructions and burials. In addition to his religious responsibilities, he will advise the commanding officer on problems affecting the welfare and morale of the men.

The Chaplain should use every opportunity and source available to exercise his ministry and to prepare the men spiritually and

11. FM 16-5, "The Chaplain," para 3, Chapter 5

mentally for a nuclear attack. Wherever he may go, from a foxhole to the supply area in the rear, men will be anticipating an atomic attack and will show signs of fear. They will look to the Chaplain for assurance and strength. If the Chaplain is to be a source of strength, he must be relaxed and in the peace of God in order to impart this experience to others. He will spend much time in prayer and surrender to our Lord Christ so that it will be Christ in him Who ministers to their need.

In addition to his spiritual ministry, the Chaplain can further strengthen his men by visiting them at their combat positions. His approach must be friendly, kindly, and desirous of helping without any false pretense. Even a little 'kidding' will help to relieve the tension and create a feeling of rapport between the soldier and Chaplain. By having the respect and confidence of the men he can effectively remind them of their patriotic and moral obligations and can help them meet the impending atomic attack with courage.

God is love, and the Chaplain, above all others, must impart this attitude of love so that the men will know that Somebody does care for them.

6. SURVIVAL AND PROTECTIVE MEASURES.

To survive an atomic attack, the Chaplain must have the protection of a good shelter. Tests made at the Nevada Test Site revealed that the best protection from atomic attack is best provided by underground bunkers, emplacements and other specially prepared shelters. Realizing that this kind of protection is beyond the capabilities of a Battle Group, the next best means of protection is a foxhole. To obtain a maximum pro-

tection, the foxhole should be dug in firm ground and revetted as much as possible. Protection from nuclear radiation requires at least fifteen inches of earth to reduce the prompt gamma radiation to one-fourth of its original intensity. For complete protection, there must be a minimum of at least three feet of earth around the hole.[12]

A foxhole is not complete protection against a nuclear attack, just as it is not complete protection against mortar or artillery fire. However, foxholes provide the most overall protection in a field combat situation, and as such, the Chaplain should get in the habit of "digging in."

In addition to digging in for his own protection, the Chaplain should also bury certain items of equipment and ecclesiastical supplies which he will need later in his religious ministrations to casualties.

The main elements in the Protestant Chaplain's ecclesiastical needs will be wine and altar bread for Communion, and water for baptisms. Assuming that the Chaplain is of a rite that practices baptism by sprinkling: he should, in that case, have a metal container filled with water so that it can be buried to protect it from contamination as well as being blown away by the blast effect of the bomb. The Communion elements also should be carried in sealed metal containers for protection against radiation blast.

It is also recommended that the Chaplain keep a small supply of comfort items for emergency use. Such things as a five-gal-

12. DA Pamphlet Nr. 39-1, pg 40-41

lon can of water (protected from contamination) and a few cigarettes will come in handy. The important thing to stress is the necessity of burying equipment to protect it from being blown away by the blast and to keep ecclesiastical elements in metal containers so that they do not become contaminated.

The effectiveness of protecting his equipment will depend upon the Chaplain's initiative and resourcefulness.

7. THE CHAPLAIN'S ATOMIC SOP.

The importance of an atomic SOP (Standing Operating Procedure)[13] cannot be over-emphasized. This will enable the Chaplain to be prepared and oriented in routine procedures in the event of an atomic attack. Prior planning is the keystone to success.

The Chaplain should be prepared for any eventuality. He should make use of his training. Foremost, he must always bear in mind that his fundamental purpose before God and man is the effective exercise of his ministry.

SECTION III

CHAPLAIN MINISTRATIONS TO CASUALTIES

8. ASSUMPTION.

For the sake of clarity, it will be assumed that the Protestant Battle Group Chaplain is in the vicinity of one of the companies and is not a casualty in an atomic attack.

9. MINISTERING TO CASUALTIES.

Immediately after an atomic explosion, there will be chaos,

13. FM 101-5, para 129e, pg 140-141

death and confusion. Many will panic in spite of having had previous schooled reactions built up by simulated battle conditions. Mob-hysteria, if permitted to go unchecked, would result in a tactical disaster. The men must be returned to their positions as quickly as possible to prevent the enemy from exploiting the advantage of the attack. It is also imperative to calm these men so that they can aid the men less fortunate and give them first aid.

Somewhere in this mob will be the Chaplain, seeking to maintain control of discipline by talking and example. If he will be able to succeed - - - God only knows!

In spite of the existing confusion, and the military expediency of getting the men back on the line, he cannot forsake his ministrations to the wounded and dying. The form of ministration will have to be brief, but not hurried. It will be impossible for the Chaplain to stay with any of the expectants until they die, even though it may seem cruel and contrary to usual practice. The number of seriously wounded and dying casualties will be so great that he must minister to as many as possible in the shortest period of time.

Just as soon as there is some reasonable amount of order, and the Chaplain has completed ministering to the expectant and dying casualties, the wounded are being taken care of by the Aid Men and non-injured personnel, the Chaplain should then immediately go to the Battle Group Aid Station or to its alternate position. Casualties from the other companies will be brought here for triage and evacuation. It is recommended that the Chaplain know the procedures of the medical service in caring for and evacuation of casualties.

The Chaplain should make every effort to let the Commanding Officer know that he was not a casualty and where he will be at all times. This information should be conveyed to the Division Chaplain by the Battle Group Headquarters, if he should inquire.

The priority in which the Chaplain ministers to casualties is very important. The Medical Service is anticipating that casualties will fall into four major groups: minimal, immediate, delayed and expectant cases. Minimal treatment patients will be those who can be returned to duty immediately, or within a short period of time. It is further anticipated that thirty percent of the casualties will be in this group. This group should be put to constructive work as soon as possible by helping in the aid station, lifting litters and other tasks. The Chaplain's ministration to this group will be primarily directed in calming their fears through prayer and other means of spiritual comfort. The comfort items the Chaplain had stored for emergency purposes, a cigarette or a cup of water, would help raise the morale of this group. The biggest problem in dealing with this group will be when they are to return to the line; they will be horrified at the thought of having to return. The Chaplain will be the only one who can allay their fears.

Casualties falling into the immediate treatment group are those who will need immediate medical treatment to save life or limb. The Chaplain will be unable to give much time to this group because the medical personnel will be treating them and they will be evacuated quickly for further care.

The delayed treatment group are those who, after receiving

emergency first aid may be evacuated or left to themselves for a period of time before further treatment is necessary. This group should be second in priority for the Chaplain's ministrations. Their need will be primarily pastoral counselling and spiritual comfort. They will feel that they are being neglected and will want immediate treatment and evacuation. The Chaplain will have to explain to them the urgency of getting the least injured back on their feet first. Dr. Sasaki, a Japanese doctor, expressed this idea forcefully to patients in the Hiroshima bombing. "The first duty," the doctor said, "is to take care of the slightly wounded. In an emergency like this, the first task is to help as many as possible - to save as many lives as possible."[14] Time permitting, this group, when assembled at a collecting point, should be given a group service and the opportunity to take Holy Communion.

The patients in the expectant treatment group have first priority on the services of the Chaplain. This group comprises the critically injured, who are given little hope for recovery. Dr. Sasaki said, "There is no hope for the heavily wounded. They will die. We can't be bothered with them."[15] Though these words were spoken by a Japanese doctor treating patients in the Hiroshima bombing, it is this same fundamental principle which will be followed by our medical service. From a medical standpoint, they may be last in priority for help, but in the Chaplain's ministration, they are first.

Although Protestants will comprise the majority of the casualties to whom the Chaplain will minister, he must not neglect those

14. Hersey, "Hiroshima," pg 67
15. Ibid, pg 67

of the other faiths, Roman Catholic or Jewish. This does not mean that he will try to simulate or imitate the rites of these groups, but will give, within the limits of spiritual comfort, the assurance of the Presence of Almighty God in the hour of need. A Jewish soldier will find great comfort in the words of the twenty-third Psalm; a Roman Catholic will respond to a prayer of confession. If in doubt, pray in the accepted tradition of your faith.

A type of casualty that cannot be overlooked are the unconscious, comatose, or semi-conscious. Because they cannot respond, it is assumed that they are dead or deaf. Yet, all the while they may grasp words with clarity, but are unable to give any sign of recognition. A Chaplain may not know his status, and a prayer in his behalf would be appropriate. The Chaplain should avoid any thoughtless remark or discussion of his condition that would excite him if he should be able to hear.

Protestants, in general, do not use manual aids or signs in their ministrations. The silent Chaplain, praying to himself is of little comfort to the patient. The Chaplain would be more effective in comforting the individual if he used some aid, as making the sign of the cross, or laying his hand upon the head of the individual while interceding for him. Of course, this will depend upon the traditions and conscience of the Chaplain.

It is anticipated that there will be a great number of psychiatric casualties. Battle Group Aid Stations will not have facilities or trained personnel to treat them. The Chaplain, out of necessity,

may have to assume the role of a psychiatrist. This does not mean that he will invade the field of professional psychiatry, but rather that he must have a willingness to hear the patient out, and try to comfort him in his stress. In some cases, this may be all that is necessary to calm the patient.

Medical personnel and facilities will be taxed beyond normal limits. The Chaplain may have to give assistance in binding the wounds of casualties, as was the experience of Dr. Sasaki, who was bewildered by the numbers of casualties and raw flesh in the Hiroshima bombing. "He lost all sense of profession and stopped working as a skillful surgeon and a sympathetic man; he became an automaton, mechanically wiping, daubing, winding, wiping, daubing, winding."[16]

There are certain items of equipment necessary to the Chaplain when ministering to casualties. It is recommended that he be issued certain items of clothing, gloves, outer garments, and shoes that have been tested and approved for protection against contamination and radiation. A small, but useful item for him to have is a sharp knife to cut away clothing from burns and wounds. A pencil does not seem to be a very important item, but is necessary to complete the Chaplain's ministrations to the wounded and dying. Change Nr. 1, FM 16-5, provides for certain religious entries on the top of the Emergency Medical Tag. Casualties who receive any ministrations should be marked according to the authorized code.

16. Hersey, "Hiroshima," pg 35.

AUTHORIZED CODE

R . . . . . Religion: Indicate specific denominational affiliation; if not, C for Catholic; P for Protestant; J for Jewish; X for other, and Y for denomination not indicated.

HC . . . . . Holy Communion administered.

ADM . . . . . Administered to by Chaplain: To be used for all other faiths to which code is not applicable.

There are other entries authorized which are applicable only to the Roman Catholic Faith.

10. THE CHAPLAIN'S ASSISTANT.

For effective religious coverage, the Chaplain should have the most capable assistant available. In choosing an assistant, the Chaplain should consider the following attributes: He should be a man of deep faith and conviction and will express it in courage on the battlefield; be able to administer first aid and help with limited religious tasks, such as leading in prayer and devotions. Additional duties for the Chaplain's Assistant are: assist in making out the religious entries on the Emergency Medical Tag; be responsible for decontaminating the Chaplain's jeep; take necessary protective measures in burying ecclesiastical supplies and comfort items; take care of the issued protective clothing and equipment and be prepared to assist in first aid.

If the Chaplain becomes a casualty, the Chaplain's Assistant may be the only available person to carry on the religious ministrations until disaster teams or other Chaplains are sent in.

11. LETTERS OF CONDOLENCE[18]

Letters of condolence present a major problem in an atomic

17. FM 16-5, C1.

18. SR 600-400-5.

attack. The overwhelming number of casualties make it all but impossible for the Chaplain to write individual letters. If the Commanding Officer designates the Chaplain to write the letter, the only possible solution would be a printed or reproduced form-type letter. He will coordinate with S-1 in obtaining the names of casualties and their next of kin. This will be an enormous task for the Chaplain, for which there is no clear-cut solution, other than making some other section, that is equipped with clerical help, responsible for the typing.

12. MASS BURIALS.

Mass burials will be coordinated by the Chaplain with the Battle Group S-1.[19] The Division policy will determine the exact procedure for burial. It is conceivable, in an atomic attack, that hasty burials will take place at the location of the explosion, and the remains placed in a common grave as the combat situation prohibits employment of normal disposition procedures.[20] The Chaplain Atomic SOP should outline in detail the procedures for conducting mass burials and method of reporting.

If the casualties are buried in a common grave, it is recommended that Chaplains of the three major faiths conduct separate services according to the rites of their faith.

Remains that can be identified by name and denomination, time and situation permitting, should be buried in a mass grave for each of the three faiths. The Chaplain should explore this possibility by coordinating with the Battle Group Recovery and Disposition Officer who

19. FM 101-5, para 116.

20. FM 10-63; AR 600-570.

will, in turn, coordinate with the Division G-1. The G-1 is responsible for the graves registration service.[21]

It is anticipated that there will be insufficient time and personnel to identify all casualties. Many will be burned and mutilated beyond recognition. Reporting mass casualty burials by name presents a sizeable problem if the vital statistics record (DA Form 16-4) is used. Lack of information, the overwhelming number of casualties, and lack of clerical help to fill out the forms, as well as the matter of supply, all present a major problem to the Chaplain in reporting mass burials. It is recommended that the present DA Form 16-4 be used only for individual or small group burials and that a new form be initiated for reporting mass burials. (See Annex A) A simplified form giving all the important information pertaining to the mass burial rather than a separate form for each identified burial will reduce the amount of clerical work and the supply problem.

SECTION IV

CHAPLAIN DISASTER TEAMS

13. PURPOSE.

The purpose of a Chaplain disaster team is to provide essential religious coverage and Chaplain ministrations in the event the assigned Chaplain becomes a casualty. The Protestant Chaplain should also be ready to give assistance to the Chaplain in a disaster area when the number of casualties exceeds the number he is able to care for.

It is recommended that these teams originate at Division

21. FM 101-1, para 116.

level and be controlled by the Division Chaplain. A workable SOP will determine which unit Chaplains will constitute a given team for a given area. It is possible that the Battle Group Chaplain may be on a team that will come to the assistance of the Division Headquarters area or other rear areas that are subject to attack. Their ministrations will be basically as outlined in paragraph nine.

In the event the entire Division is neutralized by an atomic attack, it will become the responsibility of the Corps Chaplain to provide the disaster teams.

14. SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION.

As stated in the foreword, the content of this monograph was limited to a study of the problems and possible solutions affecting the ministrations of the Protestant Chaplain in relation to casualties in atomic combat. The writer cannot possibly foresee all the problems and their solutions arising out of an atomic war.

Just as the military continually plans and reviews and changes its policies, so must the Chaplain plan, review and change his concepts to meet the urgency of the atomic battlefield. Stress must be placed on the urgency for prior planning and preparation. Courses of safety and survival methods should be taught to all Chaplains.

As long as there are men on the battlefields, the Chaplain will be there to minister to their needs. There is a great lack of concern by many in regard to their religious convictions. The Chaplain must demonstrate by his own deep-rooted faith and courage the example to meet the horrors of atomic dangers. His example will make his ministry effective, before and especially after the chaos of an atomic explosion.

The task before him is great. One can only pray that God will give him the strength, the wisdom and courage to care for the broken bodies and souls of the casualties in atomic combat.

God grant that the ideas expressed will remain a practical written exercise, and that the need will never come that any part of it will have to be used.

CHAPLAIN MASS BURIAL REPORT

TO: _____

FROM: _____

1. Cause of Casualty: _____

2. Date: _____ Time: _____ Place: _____

3. Organization(s): _____

_____

4. Date of Burial: _____

5. Place of Mass Burial (Locate by town/area and map coordinates):

_____

_____

6. Burial Rite: Catholic _____ Protestant _____ Jewish _____

7. Chaplain(s) officiating:

Name: _____ Rank _____ ASN _____

Organization/address: _____

_____

8. Number of Casualties (known or estimated) _____

9. Remarks: If a casualty list is available, attach to this form.

_____

_____

Annex A

APPENDIX

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FM 101-5, dated November, 1954

AR 600-570

SR 600-400-5